

FCC CHAIRMAN JULIUS GENACHOWSKI

PREPARED REMARKS ON PRESENTATION OF “VISIONARY OF THE  
YEAR” AWARD TO BLAIR LEVIN

COMPUTERS FOR YOUTH’S INNOVATIVE LEARNING AWARDS

NEW YORK, NY  
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Thank you. It’s always great to be back in my hometown of New York.

Don't tell my parents I'm here and didn't call them.

It's especially great to be here to honor my friend and mentor, Blair Levin, for his visionary leadership in helping harness the opportunities of technology for all Americans, and especially for kids.

Vision and leadership displayed not only in connection with the National Broadband Plan, but through a career of consistent commitment to public service and the public good.

For those of you don’t know Blair, his brother summed him up pretty well in a wedding toast: Blair is a combination of Atticus Finch, Michael Corleone, and any character ever played by Woody Allen.

We’re fortunate to be joined by some members of the National Broadband Plan team tonight – Erik Garr, Colin Crowell, Sharren Bates, and Ronnie Cho.

They’re here to honor Blair -- and also because he still owes each of them hundreds of hours in overtime pay.

I know that our other honorees tonight are no strangers to round-the-clock work to do good. Congratulations and thank you to Pamela Lopez and Ntiedo Etuk of Tabula Digita.

Thank you also to tonight’s sponsors.

And a special thanks to Elisabeth Stock and Computers for Youth for hosting tonight’s event.

The work you do is a model for non-profits: innovative, driven by facts and metrics, creative, and focused every day on the real needs of children, and on ways to harness technology and broadband to improve and expand education and opportunity for as many kids as possible. On empowerment - so that kids and families can take charge of their destiny.

I couldn't agree more with CFY's vision – and Blair's vision – that high-speed Internet opens up new worlds of learning.

With broadband, a computer in your home can become a portal to more information than the Library of Congress.

With broadband, teachers, students and parents can connect in new ways, tailoring lessons on an individualized basis to student interests and needs.

With broadband, a 19-year-old college student in Washington, DC can video tutor a 9-year-old fourth grader in Washington Heights. Students in multiple classrooms can connect with teachers and with each other, overcoming the barriers of distance.

With broadband, heavy backpacks of outdated textbooks can be replaced by a digital learning device with constantly updating tools.

Broadband can expand opportunity for students, and be a force multiplier for teachers.

When today's technologies were barely in their infancy, Blair Levin recognized the Internet's potential to transform education.

Back in the early 1990s, Blair was Chief of Staff to FCC Chairman Reed Hundt.

I was at the FCC, too, as a young staffer, with a front row seat to communications history.

Blair and Reed Hundt helped lead the creation of a new program called E-Rate, whose mission was to connect every school in America to the Internet.

In 1994, 3% of schools were connected to the Internet. Today, almost 100% of schools are connected.

But the ed tech hall of fame wouldn't be complete without Blair's name on the wall.

And that would have been true even if Blair hadn't led the development of our National Broadband Plan

As Blair made sure the Broadband Plan said, it's not enough to make sure every American kid can get online at school.

We need to make sure kids are connected at home, too.

And on that front we've got work to do.

More than 13 million school-age children don't have broadband at home.

That means 25 percent of U.S. children – one out every four kids – are missing out on the opportunities of broadband.

There are too many kids like the 17-year-old girl in Alachua County, Florida - who wrote us about how she does her homework in the parking lot of the local library at night – where she can get Wi-Fi after the library closes – because her family doesn't have broadband at home.

It's moving to talk to school teachers about the impossible challenge the broadband gap presents.

They say: Half our kids don't have broadband access at home; what am I supposed to do?

If I give out homework that requires Internet research and connectivity, I'm leaving behind half my students who don't have broadband at home.

If I don't give out those assignments, I'm leaving behind an entire class who'll be missing out on the learning opportunities of the Internet and the development of the digital skills they need.

Blair was very early to identify the opportunities of wireless technology and education, particularly digital textbooks

In his State of the Union address this year, President Obama laid out a vision of wireless future that included "students who can take classes with digital textbooks."

It wasn't the first time a President turned to an idea of Blair's in a State of the Union.

And as President Obama said, it's at least as much about the people - about the kids and parents and teachers - as it's about the technology.

This emphasis on people first - harnessing technology to unleash and empower people, especially kids - is something that's central to the thinking of both CFY and the National Broadband Plan.

Under Blair's leadership and with the help of a great team, the Plan proposed an excellent agenda on 21<sup>st</sup> century digital learning, and I'm happy to say that with their help the FCC has moved forward on that agenda.

Transforming the E-rate program so that it can bring higher speeds at lower costs to schools and libraries; so that schools can open their Internet connections to their communities; and so that schools can explore the benefits of wireless broadband and digital textbooks.

Let me close by saying one other thing about the National Broadband Plan, and about Blair.

An overwhelming number of people throughout the broadband ecosystem praised the Broadband Plan . . . Not an easy thing to achieve these days in Washington.

They praised its thoughtfulness and rigor.

They praised its proactive agenda and innovative ideas.

They said it was the single most powerful strategic agenda ever set out by the FCC, indeed by any communications policy agency in the world.

I think the reason people saw the Plan as so powerful – so visionary – is that it combined world-class strategic and analytical work with deep passion and caring for people - for kids and others in our society with futures at risk.

The Plan, in other words, had both a head and a heart.

That's an extraordinary thing. And no one deserves more credit than the Plan's incredible leader, who combines real brilliance with deep caring, Blair Levin.

On behalf of Computers for Youth, it's my great honor to present Blair Levin with the "Visionary of the Year" award.